
Media Release

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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA REMAINS ON “ACADEMIC PROBATION”

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*New SCAG Report Card Gives Region Low Marks for
Transportation, Air Quality, Housing, Income, Other Areas*

LOS ANGELES, CA – Worsening traffic congestion and air quality, the lack of affordable housing and the loss of high-paying manufacturing jobs present a real threat to maintaining Southern California’s quality of life, according to a new State of the Region report released today by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG).

The State of the Region serves as an annual “Report Card” for the six-county SCAG region, rating its performance in seven policy categories, including transportation (D-), employment (B), income (C-), housing (D+), air quality (C-), safety (B) and education (D). In light of the report’s findings, SCAG’s leaders also noted that the funding cuts currently being considered in Sacramento could make matters significantly worse for the region.

“Southern California is one of the most dynamic regions in the world, but the challenges we face are significant,” said Riverside Mayor Ron Loveridge, who chairs the SCAG task force that developed the report. “We sincerely believe that this report should serve as an alarm bell for the region and for elected officials at all levels of government.”

Southern California again ranked as the nation’s most congested metropolitan area and received a dismal **D-** grade for mobility. The region continues to rank as the most congested in the country, with the accumulated costs associated with congestion reaching an astounding \$12 billion. Mass transit has also seen about a two percent decline since last year’s report.

“We all know how bad traffic congestion is today, and it will only get worse unless we make significant investments in our transportation infrastructure,” said SCAG President and Temecula City Councilmember Ron Roberts. “Our roads and freeways become more bogged down every year, and our transit systems are not meeting their full potential.”

The region’s air quality grade also declined from a C in last year’s report to a **C-** this year. The number of days in which the South Coast Air Basin exceeded federal ozone standards increased from 49 to 68 days, although ozone pollution improved during 2004 due to milder weather. Both the South Coast and Salton Sea Air Basins continued to exceed federal standards for particulate pollution. The report illustrates the relationship between increasing traffic congestion and worsening air pollution.

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With a continued lack of affordable, available housing, Southern California's housing grade remained at a **D+** in this year's report. While the number of housing permits issued was the largest single-year increase since 1990, housing affordability continues to be a significant hurdle. Less than one-third of the region's households could afford a median-priced home in Southern California, compared to more than half of the households nationally. Among the nation's nine major metro areas, Southern California has the highest percentage of households spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing.

"The issue of housing affordability, availability and accessibility goes to the core of our long-term economic health and quality of life," said Port Hueneme City Councilmember and SCAG First Vice President Toni Young. "Virtually nothing is more sacred than the home, which in Southern California, is becoming more and more difficult to attain each year. But people are having to buy their homes far away from their jobs, which affects the congestion on our roads, the air we breathe, the jobs we are able to attract and maintain, the very essence of our regional community."

"The challenges raised by the State of the Region are interrelated," said Los Angeles County Supervisor and SCAG Regional Councilmember Yvonne Burke. "Lower income residents tend to have fewer educational opportunities which in turn perpetuate their inability to obtain better paying jobs. Without higher wages, they often find home ownership out of reach. To find a home they can afford, they often have to move farther and farther away from their job out into the suburbs and more increasingly the 'boomburbs,' which means they're spending more time on the roads and adding to congestion and air quality problems. We must work together to solve these problems from a variety of approaches."

Southern California also scored mixed grades in four other areas:

- ? **Employment (B):** After losing 21,000 jobs in 2002, the region achieved a 14,000 increase in job generation in 2003 while the rest of the nation continued to decline. On the negative side, the ongoing state budget crisis resulted in the loss of 10,000 government-sector jobs for the region.
- ? **Income (C-):** The Southern California region has plummeted from the fourth highest in 1970 among the nation's 17 largest metropolitan regions to 16th in 2003. Nearly 15 percent of the region's population lives in poverty.
- ? **Education (D):** This represents one of the report's worst grades. Eighth graders continued to perform below the national media in reading and math test scores. Large disparities in educational attainment persist for the Latino and African-American communities when compared to non-Hispanic White and Asian populations.
- ? **Safety (B):** This grade represents one of the report's few bright spots. Violent crime rates across the region declined by nearly six percent, although Los Angeles County continues to have among the highest rates in the nation. The number of hate crimes decreased by about 12 percent.

For more information about SCAG's State of the Region Report, please call Jeff Lustgarten at 323/466-3445. To view the complete report, or to get more information about SCAG's 40 years of service to the Southern California region, visit the SCAG web site at www.scag.ca.gov.